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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000097

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [IR](#) [KU](#) [KUWAIT](#) [IRAN](#) [RELATIONS](#)
SUBJECT: (C) SENIOR KUWAITI SHI'A CLERIC: RAFSANJANI
BELIEVES IRANIANS TURNING AGAINST AHMADINEJAD

REF: A. 06 KUWAIT 3733
[1](#)B. 06 KUWAIT 630

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reason 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: A senior Kuwaiti Shi'a cleric told Poloff January 22 that Rafsanjani believes Iranian public opinion is shifting away from Ahmadinejad and towards Iranian "moderates." Sayed Mohammed Baqer Al-Mohri, who met privately with Rafsanjani January 17, said Rafsanjani attributed this shift to Ahmadinejad's failure to deliver on campaign promises, his appointment of incompetent officials, the rising cost of goods, and Iran's increasing isolation in the international community. According to Al-Mohri, Rafsanjani supported the idea of a dialogue between the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and Iran on Iraq. Al-Mohri urged the U.S. to talk to Iranian moderates, like Rafsanjani, saying "you have your channels." On Iraq, Al-Mohri strongly and repeatedly stressed the need for the Iraqi Shi'a to engage and "appease" Saudi Arabia, and argued that the Sunnis in Iraq must not be excluded or marginalized from the political process. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) During a January 22 meeting, senior Kuwaiti Shi'a cleric Sayed Mohammed Baqer Al-Mohri gave Poloff a read out of his recent visit to Iran and "private meeting" January 17 with former president Hashemi Rafsanjani. Al-Mohri said Rafsanjani told him that for the past eight months Iranian public opinion had been steadily shifting away from Ahmadinejad and his supporters and towards more "moderate," pragmatic Iranian leaders, as evidenced by the Assembly of Experts elections in December in which moderates made substantial gains. According to Al-Mohri, Rafsanjani attributed this growing disillusionment with Ahmadinejad to his failure to deliver on campaign promises, Iran's increasing isolation in the international community, the rising price of essential goods, and the incompetence of some officials appointed by Ahmadinejad. Al-Mohri said Rafsanjani believed public opinion would continue to shift away from Ahmadinejad.

[1](#)3. (C) Al-Mohri claimed Rafsanjani wholeheartedly agreed with him on the need for a dialogue between the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Iran on Iraq. Asked if Rafsanjani commented about the President's new Iraq strategy, Al-Mohri did not respond directly, but noted that the Iranians wanted to avoid escalating tensions with the Americans in Iraq. He said the Iranians were "not happy" with the raid on their offices in Irbil, but were optimistic that those arrested would soon be released. He encouraged the U.S. to open a dialogue with Iranian moderates, like Rafsanjani. Al-Mohri, who travels regularly to Iran, characterized the current economic situation in the country as "dismal." He observed that the price of bread, eggs, and meat had surged and was now much higher than in Kuwait.

Iraqi Shi'a Must "Appease" Saudi Arabia

14. (C) Expressing his concern about the situation in Iraq, Al-Mohri strongly and repeatedly emphasized the need for Iraqi Shi'a to reach out to and "appease" Saudi Arabia. "The Saudis should be given their share in Iraq," he argued. Al-Mohri said he had conveyed this message to Shi'a leaders in Iraq, many of whom he claims to know personally and maintain regular contact with. He told them that if the Saudis rebuffed their approaches they should seek U.S. mediation. Al-Mohri stressed that, although a minority, the Sunnis in Iraq should not be marginalized or excluded from the political process.

Bio Note

15. (C) According to several contacts, including Al-Mohri himself, Al-Mohri is the representative of Iraqi cleric Ali Al-Sistani in Kuwait and is authorized to collect khums (Shi'a religious tax) on his behalf. Al-Mohri also claims to have close connections to many of Iran's top leaders, including Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and former presidents Khatami and Rafsanjani. Al-Mohri seems to relish his connections and regularly drops names in meetings. He told Poloff in this meeting that he had not met with Ahmadinejad by choice, suggesting he disagrees with Ahmadinejad's political and religious leanings.

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